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Tracts for the Times::::No. 2.

GOVERNMENT

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL

CHURCH.

75492-112

BY REV. A. STEVENS.

"It should be repeated until it comes into the currency of a proverb, to innovate is not to reform."—*Burke.*

"Human experience, which is always contradicting theory, is the only test of truth."—*Johnson.*

"A great door and effectual is opened—and there are many adversaries."—*Paul.*

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GOVERNMENT OF THE M. E. CHURCH.

The chief innovation in the government of the Meth. Epis. Church, demanded by seceders, is that it should be *modelled on the representative system of the nation.* Let it be distinctly understood in the outset that the question is not *whether the laity should have a due control of the government of the church*—we shall show in the sequel that in the M. E. Church they have this abundantly—*but whether this control shall be put into the representative form of our civil system?* Without discussing here the abstract right of individuals to such a claim in a compact which they voluntarily entered and can voluntarily leave, and which stipulated no such arrangement when they entered it, we shall consider more particularly the *inexpediency and impracticability of the proposed change.* Whatever may be said of abstract right in the case, it will undoubtedly be admitted that an abstract right may be voluntarily resigned for a supposed good. This indeed is a necessary condition of civil government,—the surrender of certain personal rights for the greater security of others more important. Every man has an abstract right to his own property, but by becoming a member of the State he so far resigns this right as to allow his rulers or a majority of his fellow citizens to appropriate a portion of his property by taxation, even against his own opinion of its necessity. Self-preservation is a right of the individual, but civil government may require the sacrifice of life in the public defence. The Methodist polity is based on such a mutual surrrender of rights—bearing, however, far more onerously on the ministry than on the laity—and if the principle should be admitted that the proposed change ought to made because it is a natural right, it is obvious that the most valued features of the system must be at once sacrified, and Methodism be no more Methodism; for on this principle, the Itinerancy (under God the strength of our system,) must cease, it being doubtless an abstract right of the churches to choose their own preachers, leaders and other officers, and also of the preachers to choose their own fields of labor. Unquestionably the claim of these rights by the people on the one hand, and the preachers on the other, would reduce us at once to Congregationalism, and extinguish the peculiar efficiency of

our cause. The change demanded should therefore be considered merely in the light of *expediency*, not of right; if it could be proved more useful than our present arrangement, we are morally obliged to adopt it: if not, we are at perfect liberty to reject it. We believe it to be neither necessary nor desirable.

1. *Because there is no such analogy between our relation to the M. E. Church and our relation to the State, as is asserted by the advocates of the proposed change.* "The two governments are totally dissimilar in their *origin*, their *authority*, and their *design*."*

They differ in their *origin*. Our civil government originated with the people;—they were necessarily antecedent to their rulers and constitution, the sources of power and change in the government.—The government of our church originated providentially with Wesley and his colleagues, (see Tract No. 1.) It was *originally* and of *necessity* in their hands, and its subsequent administrators are such by virtue of its provisions as then established. All who have come under it have done so with an understanding of its terms, and a *voluntary* consent to them. It was a mutual compact for certain ends, and those ends have confessedly been attained and the terms of the compact maintained inviolate.

They differ in their *authority*.

"The civil government claims our allegiance from the very circumstance of our being born within its jurisdiction; and long before we are admitted to the right of suffrage, our property, our liberty, and our life itself, depend on the authority of the government; our obedience to the laws of the country does not depend on our individual consent to them, either before or after we arrive at age; we may consider them grievous and oppressive, but we have no alternative but to obey. We can in no way withdraw from this allegiance, but by abandoning our country; and circumstances may place even this out of our power. There arises, therefore, from the nature of our civil obligations, a right to participate in the enactment of the laws by which we are to be governed, as soon as we are deemed capable of exercising this right. But change the nature of these obligations—make membership in the community and obedience to the laws a matter of choice, and the rights which belong to the former relation no longer remain. The rights and the obligations are necessarily reciprocal.—Where obedience is necessary, the corresponding rights are inherent; but where the obedience is voluntary, the privileges are conditional, and are in extent no more than are stipulated for in the contract between those who govern and those who are governed. Now this is precisely the relation we sustain to the Methodist Episcopal Church. It did not extend its jurisdiction over us in our infancy, nor until we voluntarily entered within its pale. Our becoming members was a voluntary act, done with a previous knowledge of all the rights we were required to surrender, and the

* Bond's Appeal, Balt., 1828. This is a document of remarkable ability. It had a decisive influence in settling the disputes of 1828. We are much indebted to it in the first part of this tract; besides the quotations in arguments 1, 4, 6 and 7, we have condensed much from it in 1 and 7. The whole appeal should be republished, but it is too long (69 pages) for a tract. Our quotations themselves are much condensed.

privileges we acquired by the contract. We could not carry with us into this voluntary association, any natural rights incompatible with the contract we then entered into; and if the right to participate in the legislative power was no part of the conditions we stipulated for, can we now complain that it is improperly withheld from us? Surely not. If to this we add that there remains to us the right of dissolving the obligations we have voluntarily taken upon ourselves, what becomes of the analogy which has been so strangely insisted upon, between our civil and ecclesiastical relations? or what of the charge of usurpation and tyranny, which has been so repeatedly made against our church?

"The rights which a Methodist possesses, as such, are purely conventional. They are not natural, but acquired rights, and they are determined by the articles of association, contained in our book of discipline. The church is *a voluntary association, entered into for religious purposes*—whoever enters into its communion is entitled to all the immunities which the articles of association hold out to him—and no more.—If he finds upon experiment, that the religious advantages he acquires do not compensate him for the sacrifices he is required to make, he has an indefeasible right to withdraw from the community; but he has no right to demand of the church to change her economy for his accommodation."—[Bond.

Is it alleged in reply that many enter the church young or ignorant of the terms of its compact? We answer, it is not responsible for this;—its Discipline is made accessible to all; all are urged to read it and judge for themselves. All that can be demanded of the church is, that when such arrive at mature age or better information, she should allow them to dissolve their connection with the compact, if they find it not satisfactory.

Is it further replied that a member of the church has invested property in church edifices, &c., and ought not to be required to sacrifice it? We answer, that in respect to our *free houses*, (and most of them are *free*,) such investments were *not terms of membership;* they were *voluntary benefactions*, by which the donors acquired *no property* in such free churches. They were erected for any and all who choose to use them, and if they are secured by the terms of their erection to the doctrines and usages of Methodism, this also must have been the *voluntary* act of the donors. The original design being fulfilled, no complaint can be just on the part of those who may choose, after such charities, to leave the cause to which they were given. It should be remembered also that many who are dead, and many who are not members of the church, have contributed to such *free houses* on the same terms and for the same beneficent purpose. Has a man a right to reclaim a *charity*, which by being blended with that of others, dead and alive, cannot be returned without frustrating an object of public beneficence? and that, too, when the original terms of the grant are fully adhered to? Such a claim, it is clear, by destroying all grounds of the permanent security of charitable bequests, would soon suppress all similar liberality. Such

a claim is no more admissable in this case than in any other benevolent foundation. So much for *free houses ;*—in respect to the pewed, where, as in New England, the seceding member has individual property in them,—he voluntarily contracted for the terms on which it is held, and on leaving, can dispose of it to others on the same terms, precisely in the manner that he can dispose of his bank stock or other property held by contract with public bodies.

Again, they differ in their *design.*

"Civil government is instituted to promote the welfare of those included within the compact. Their own interest is the only object to be provided for, and therefore no more natural rights are to be surrendered than are necessary to secure the object of the association. Such a community is not expected to provide for any without the pale of its jurisdiction; for those who contribute nothing to the common stock cannot be entitled to receive from the contributions of others.

"Now, the design of our religious association is essentially different. It is true, we propose to increase the religious advantages of our members—but then our system is essentially a missionary one; it is intended for those who belong not to the community; to send the gospel to those who are too poor to pay for it, or too ignorant to appreciate its value and therefore do not desire it. Is it then strange that such an association, formed for purposes so widely different from those which influence us in the organization of civil compacts, should also differ from civil government as much in its structure as it does in its design? Will not such a religious community be necessarily called upon to make sacrifices of individual rights and advantages which it is not at all necessary to make as members of civil society? To combine the two-fold advantages, of providing Pastors for the church, and Missionaries for the world, and fulfil the duties incumbent upon both—the regulations required for such an arrangement, being such as chiefly relate to the distribution of ministerial labor, the right of making such regulations has been left to the ministry themselves, and the people, or laity, have moreover relinquished the right of electing their own pastors, because the exercise of this right was incompatible with the plan of an itinerating missionary ministry.

"But if this original missionary design called for important sacrifices on the part of the laity, did it not demand a still more important surrender of *natural rights*, on the part of our itinerant ministers? They not only relinquish the right of selecting their own field of labor, but submit to the absolute disposal of a general superintendent, whom they have clothed with authority, to send them to any part of the land; and that, too, without any guaranty from those to whom they are sent, that they shall be supplied with even the necessaries of life.

"We can conceive of no sacrifices of individual rights, comforts and conveniences, superior to those which our travelling preachers are thus called upon to make, in order to fulfil the primitive missionary design of our institutions."—[Bond.

We have thus far shown that the essential difference between our civil and ecclesiastical systems in respect to their *origin*, *design*, and the *obedience they* demand, admits of no such analogy between them as requires a conformity of the one to the other.

2. We observe further, that *such a conformity to the model of our political system is not considered necessary nor desirable in most of the voluntary organizations of a secular character in the land.* They

adapt themselves to their designs and emergencies, and are content with such arrangements as will best effect their objects, controlled by such checks and balances as will prevent abuses. *This is precisely the arrangement of the Meth. Epis. Church, as we shall by and by see.* Nay, our civil government itself presents, in some of its collateral branches similar deviations from its general model. It maintains an *army* and *navy*. The power of military command is absolute; the only maxim of the soldier is to "obey," if it carries him to the cannon's mouth. How would the representative principle work amidst the emergencies of the camp or of the high seas? What propriety is there then in this indiscriminate cry of "republicanism," in reference to *voluntary* compacts. We are sure that no American citizens love republicanism better than the members of our church, but this boisterous fallacy has always proved too flimsy to beguile their sound discernment. They believe that being under the broad shelter of a free civil system, to which all other organizations are responsible, the latter may assume any form that convenience or efficiency may justify, without serious danger. Their church system is altogether *militant*, requiring great sacrifices, great energy and decisive promptness; they believe that they can have such a system, with its pacific and beneficent ends, under the civil system of the land, with as much, nay, more propriety than the latter can maintain an army or navy, or than pecuniary companies involving the property of thousands, can deviate from the precise model of the State. But by the sweeping generalizations of our opponents we would not only be compelled to abolish our military and naval regimen, but also the authority of the parent in the family, the government of most of our literary institutions, and the discretionary arrangements of most of our business combinations.

3. The conformity to a secular system demanded by our opponents is *considered unnecessary and inexpedient by most, if not all ecclesiastical organizations of the country.* All protestant ones provide, we believe, a suitable popular control of their respective systems — as we shall show ours does — but we know of none that does not deviate essentially from our civil forms in the exercise of that control — and upon a minute comparison it will be found, we think, that the Methodist system includes as much security of the popular rights as any one of them.

The Protestant Episcopal Church has a representative system, but with such clerical powers as can entirely control it. However unanimous the General Convention may be, they cannot appoint a Bishop without the consent of the existing Bishops. Our Bishops have no

voice whatever in the choice of their colleagues. Whatever law may be passed, and with whatever unanimity by the Protestant Episcopal Convention, the Bishops can nullify it by an absolute veto power. Meth. Bishops have no veto, nor even vote in making any law whatever, though it should affect themselves alone.

The Presbyterian Church has laymen in its ecclesiastical bodies, but not on the representative system — none being admissible beside the clergy except ruling elders, who are elected for life, and therefore instead of representing the views of the present church, may represent only those of ten, twenty, or thirty years ago — the date of their election. The Congregationalists certainly do not follow our representative system, but exercise the popular control without limitation — a mode which, in large bodies is but anarchy, and among our Congregational brethren has been attended with no little distraction. The Quakers have no voting whatever, but follow in all things the counsels of seniority and experience, and find no inconvenience in this course.

The Protestant Methodists themselves, after all their urgency for republican rights in ecclesiastical bodies, have adopted a course which violates the fundamental principal of republican representation by an unequal representation of different classes. They allow as many representatives for their few clergymen as they do for all the hundreds of their laity, and the late seceders have adopted the same aristocratic arrangement. If adopted into our system it would give to our four thousand preachers the same representation that it would allow to our more than million members! This certainly is not fair republicanism. If we are to be reproached for judging the plan inexpedient, how much more credit is due to our neighbors who, with the loftiest pretentions to it, present such a distortion of it? So badly too has the innovation worked among our Protestant Methodist brethren, that one of the most eminent leaders of the movement, Rev. A. Shinn, wrote an admonitory letter to the leaders of the late secession, on the subject, declaring that "they have had no little difficulty in keeping their denomination from being scattered to the winds by a loose and deplorable spirit of anarchy." Although he wishes popular representation in the General Conference, and thinks that in a modified form, it might succeed in the Annual Conference, yet he admits fully, its mischievous effects in his own church; referring to a modification of it which he attempted to introduce in the convention in 1830, he says, "I was overruled, and from that day until now, the evidence has been constant and uniform, that the love of power in the sovereign people as regularly turns a deaf ear

to argument, as does the love of power in bishops or itinerant ministers.*" The project has certainly failed after most deplorable strife for its introduction.

In the Protestant Epis. Church, Bishops have the sole right of admitting persons to membership in the church, by confirmation. In the Methodist Epis. Church, no one can be admitted without six months probation, and then by recommendation of a lay officer and an examination before the church. In the Protestant Episcopal Church the expulsion of a member is solely with the clergyman, and there is no appeal but to the Bishop; in the Methodist Episcopal Church, no member can be expelled but after trial by the church or a committee of the church, and has then an appeal to the quarterly conference, chiefly composed of lay officers; while in the Presbyterian Church the preacher and ruling Elder, (appointed for life,) alone try and expel members; and in the Congregational, juries, as in secular courts, are not allowed, and however intense the public excitement in any given case, the whole society have the right of trying and punishing the accused; a mode certainly liable to serious objections, and which would be most calamitous in civil governments. In the Presbyterian Church, candidates for the ministry are admitted to the office by the Presbytery; and in the Congregational, the associations of the clergy alone, admit them, while in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the people make the ministry, and as we shall show hereafter, by a process remarkably minute.

In most, if not all Protestant Churches the clergy stipulate with the people for their salaries, and can prosecute them at law; in the Methodist Episcopal Church, they can rely only on the *voluntary contributions* of the people, and have no legal right for the supply of any deficiency in their allowance.

We might extend these comparisons further, but they are sufficient to show that our own church admits a popular influence not surpassed in the most important respects by any other. We have not made these comparisons to disparage our brethren of other sects. Most of the points we have referred to in their respective systems, are not objectionable if counterbalanced by suitable checks.

They prove fully our position, that though these sects may all ad-

* See his letter in the "True Wesleyan," Feb. 18, 1843. He further says in this letter, that "The love of power is a deep disease in human nature; and it is not confined to any one order of men. The sovereign people are as proud of their sovereignty as a monarch upon his throne; and the lawless rage of a mob is no better than that of an individual tyrant. If you put all power into the democratic body, they will soon show themselves 'many masters;' and a destructive anarchy will be as great a traitor to the Redeemer, as a domineering hierarchy" Rather aristocratic sentiments certainly, for a Methodist seceder

mit a sufficient popular control, it is not exercised on the plan of our representative system; they, in common with the M. E. Church, do not deem this plan necessary nor expedient in religious and voluntary organizations.

4. *There is nothing in our system which requires or justifies the proposed change.* When such a revolution is demanded, it is proper to inquire, Where is the necessity of it? What evil is it to remedy?

Is it intended to alter our articles of religion? These have not been questioned by our disaffected members.

Are the lay members of the conference to effect any change in our moral discipline? With this, also, our opponents have publicly expressed their satisfaction. In fact, the church did not *make* it, and, therefore, must not alter it. It is none other than that which is prescribed by the gospel itself.

Now there remains nothing more, in our economy in reference to the laity, except those prudential regulations, which have been deemed necessary to enable the pastors of the church to execute and enforce the discipline. Of these regulations, the principal complaint has been against class-meeting, as a term of membership. The class-meeting, we believe, the membership are not disposed to abolish; on the contrary, the great majority of the church consider it an indispensable provision, while we retain an itinerant ministry.

"Is it then to legislate on the temporal concerns of the church, that laymen are necessary in its business bodies?

"The *General Conference*, the highest body in our system, have never attempted to interfere authoritatively in our temporal matters. The regulations they have made on this subject, have been only recommendatory. *The General Conference have never considered themselves authorized to levy taxes upon the laity, or to make any pecuniary contribution a condition of membership in the church.*"—[Bond.

Nine tenths of the business of the General Conference relates to the preachers alone, and it has expressly declared that it has no properly *legislative* powers. Though it makes rules and regulations for its great work, it pretends to do nothing more in this respect than scripturally pertains to the ministerial office. In its Report on the subject in 1828, it says:—

"We arrogate no authority to enact any laws of our own, either of moral or of civil force. Our commission is to preach the gospel, and to enforce the moral discipline, established by the one Lawgiver, by those spiritual powers vested in us, as subordinate pastors, who watch over souls as they that must give account to the chief Shepherd. We claim no strictly legislative powers, although we grant the terms 'legislature' and 'legislative' have been sometimes used even among ourselves. In a proper sense, however, they are not strictly applicable to our General Conference. A mistake on this point has probably been the source of much erroneous reasoning, and of some consequent dissatisfaction. *Did we claim any authority to enact laws to affect either life or limb, to touch the persons or to tax the property of our members, they ought, unquestionably, to be directly represented among us.* But they know we do not. We certainly, then, exercise no civil legislation. As to the moral code, we are subject, equally with themselves, to one only Lord. We have no power to add o, to take from, to alter, or to modify a single item of his statues. Whether laymen

or ministers be the authorized expounders and administrators of those laws, we can confidently rely on the good Christian sense of the great body of our brethren to judge. These well know, also, that whatever expositions of them we apply to others, the same are applied equally to ourselves, and in some instances, with peculiar strictness.'

So much for the General Conference.

The *Annual Conference* is the next body in our system. Representation is certainly not necessary here, for its business, excepting a few *judicial* items, relating alone to travelling and local preachers, is *entirely executive*, and concerns only the preachers. No rule or regulation can be made by it except such as is merely advisory. The appointments of the preachers are not a part of its business; they are only announced in it.

The third body, the *Quarterly Conference*, which has most control of the pecuniary and local business of the churches, is almost entirely composed of laymen. An objection to the manner of their appointment we shall notice in the sequel.

Is it objected here that there ought to be a combination of laymen with clergymen in the business bodies of the church, however limited may be the functions of these bodies, because history records the great abuse of clerical power, as, for instance, in the Papal system? We reply that they thus control the one which most affects their interests, and of the others have a full controlling power in *another form*. There is not the remotest relation between the the historical instances referred to and our economy—they grew out of the connection of the church with civil power, and its consequent release from the popular will; our ministry is dependent utterly on the *voluntary support* of the people.

"We thereby, have over them a *positive and absolute control;* for whenever their flocks shall withdraw their support, the preachers will be under the necessity of abandoning their present pastoral relation, and of betaking themselves to some secular occupation. These contributions depend for their continuance on the *affection* which the laity bear to their pastors. There can, therefore, be no danger of these pastors attempting to exercise any tyrannical authority over them."—[Bond.

It does then appear, that the revolution in our polity, so urgently demanded by seceders, is almost without an object. There is certainly none sufficient to justify the risk of the change, especially when it is considered that the system is already amply controlled by the people in another manner.

5. *This plan would be impracticable on account of its pecuniary embarrassments.*

"Suppose the delegates elected, the next question to be asked, is, who is to bear their travelling expenses to and from the conference? The delegate, or his constituents? and how are they to be provided for during the session? If it be answered that their expenses will be borne as those of the travelling preachers are now provided

for; we reply, that the case of the one kind of delegates is not at all similar to that of the other. In the first place, the preachers, on their road to, and from the conference, labor all the way, in their vocation. They are, every where, received and entertained as missionaries—as a kind of common property, in which every member of their church has an equal interest. The preacher, on his part, is accustomed to be entertained by the membership, without making any pecuniary compensation; he has only to preach to them, and to pray with them, and they consider themselves amply remunerated. Now, it will not be so with the lay delegates. They must travel as other laymen do. They will not condescend to ask for accommodations of strangers, but will pay for them at the public houses.

"In the second place, we know that some difficulty has been always experienced in providing for the preachers at the General Conference; and, hence, it may be fairly questioned, whether the members would accommodate the lay delegates at all; and, on the other hand, as these delegates will not have been accustomed to receive gratuitous entertainment of strangers, they will not feel free to receive two or three months board for nothing. If this should turn out to be the case, then we must add the expenses of boarding, lodging, &c., to the expenses of the delegate; and, without any allowance for the loss of time, or for the injury which his business will sustain by the negligence or improvidence of those who superintend his affairs while he is from home, the expenses of a delegate will be no inconsiderable sum.

"We think it will be impossible for the distant sections of our church, to find men who are able to meet these expenses, and give the time which the duties of a delegate will necessarily require. They cannot be found amongst any of those whose personal attention is necessary to their callings in life. The farmer, the merchant, the lawyer, the physician, and the tradesman cannot spare the time, even, if they could afford the expense; and the idle may not furnish the very best materials for representatives to the church legislature. If, however, men of wealth and leisure can be every where found, as willing as they are able, to go, at their own expense, it would become a question of no ordinary interest, to the Methodists, whether they ought to adopt a system of government which would make rich men absolutely necessary to them; or which would exclude from their councils, the brethren of less fortune, though, possibly, possessed of better gifts, and more experience.

"We think it must be obvious, that, before the Methodists can have a lay representation, they must provide funds to meet, at least, the expenses of the delegates, if not to make them some compensation for their loss of time. To raise these funds in some districts, will be utterly impossible, for they are not able to pay their preachers the small stipends to which they are entitled. It is well known, that in many, if not most of the conferences, such is the amount of deficiencies, in the circuits, that after all the collections from the other circuits and stations are brought into conference, the preachers seldom have been able to divide amongst those who are deficient, more than fifty cents in the dollar. We are at a loss to know how those circuits, which cannot pay their preachers are to raise the money to pay lay delegates. But this is not all. The remote districts, many of which are among those that are least able to pay their delegates, will have to incur much greater expense than those which are located nearer the General Conference, as their delegates will have farther to travel. This would not only be oppressive, but unjust. As the representation is intended for the common benefit, no one part of the membership ought to pay more than another.

"From these considerations, it will appear, that the representatives must be paid out of some common fund, to be provided by the whole church; and further, that this fund, as it is intended to meet expenses that must *certainly* accrue, cannot be

looked for from sources that are uncertain; and, therefore, must not depend upon the voluntary contributions of the members of the church. It can, then, only be raised by direct *taxation*; and to levy this tax will be one of the many new powers which must be given to the General Conference, when constituted as the seceders would have it. To levy a tax, without having the power to enforce the collection of it, would be an absurdity; and I can see but one means of enforcing the collection, and that will be, to turn those out of the church who do not comply with the requisition. Here, then, will be a new condition of membership; and we hope there are few of us who would consent to hold our membership upon any *pecuniary* condition whatever. But, if we do consent to this tax, how shall it be levied? Will it be by an equal assessment on property? or will it be a poll tax? The first would be vexatious, and give rise to endless disputes; and the other would be both unjust and oppressive. In short, look at this Utopian scheme on whatever side you will, if you only bring it near enough to see it in its details, it will appear equally absurd and impracticable.

"It may be alleged, however, that if each electoral district be allowed to raise, by subscription, the amount necessary to pay their own delegate; those who do not send delegates will have no right to complain, if others, more liberal, should avail themselves of the privilege. We reply, that this would be true, in reference to those who had the means, and declined to avail themselves of the advantages accorded to them; but will not apply to those who cannot send delegates, for want of the means: these would have a right to complain—not indeed because others enjoyed a blessing in which they could not participate, but because their former situation was made worse, by the advantages accorded to their wealthier brethren. This will be obvious, from the following considerations: the regulations, by which the whole church is now governed, are made by those who have no local or fixed residence; but they necessarily acquire a knowlege of the local circumstances, and particular necessities of our membership, in the different sections of the United States. Now, if the interests of the laity were confided to a partial representation, chiefly, if not entirely, composed of delegates from the circuits and stations in the vicinity of the General Conference, the situation of those sections which could not be represented by their own delegates, would be very materially altered for the worse. They will then be legislated for, not only by those who are in no way responsible to them, but by those who do not even know them, and, of consequence, are totally unacquainted with their sentiments or their circumstances. So far, then, from enjoying new privileges by the contemplated changes in our ecclesiastical polity, they would be robbed of the equal advantages which they now enjoy. It is easy to foresee, without pretending to any extraordinary sagacity, that such a state of things would necessarily bring about a dismemberment of our ecclesiastical union. The more remote Annual Conference districts, not being able to send representatives to the General Conferences, where the other districts were represented, would withdraw from the confederacy, and institute a legislature of their own, more conveniently located."—[Bond.

6. But suppose all these difficulties surmounted, it would still be *impossible fully to adopt the plan*. According to the republican principle that representation should be apportioned to numbers, the change would absolutely be impracticable among us unless the ministry should be virtually excluded from the representative body. Our travelling ministers are now 4,000; the membership 1,068,000. If, then, we should have but one representative to a thousand, it would give us 4 for all the clergy, that is one for every 8 Con-

ferences! virtually none at all; while for the laity there would be 1068! and this too in a body nine-tenths of whose business relate only to the clergy. And certainly the number cannot be increased, to accommodate the clergy, for even at the above reduced rate, the body would be unmanageably large; and if on the other hand it should be reduced still more, to render it more manageable, the clerical representation must be entirely cut off!

7. If, however, by violating a fundamental principle of republican representation, we should allow as many clergymen as laymen in the representative body—the plan adopted by our seceding brethren—while, as we have already shown, there is no necessity for such an arrangement, *it would be productive of incalculable evils to the church.* Our present representation is one for every 21 preachers, and affords about 190 members to the General Conference; if we reduce this number one-half to make room for the lay delegation, it will give the preachers one representative for every 42, and estimating two preachers to a circuit, it will take 21 circuits to send one itinerant delegate; as the lay representation is to be equal, it will take the same number of circuits to send one lay delegate. Now, how are these lay delegates to be chosen? No candidate can be known personally to one in several hundreds of the Methodists on the 21 circuits which form his electoral district, and if they know him not, how will they be fit to judge of his qualifications?

"To obviate this difficulty in the election of delegates by the members immediately, it will be necessary to institute an electoral college—composed of electors, chosen in each circuit separately, who shall meet and choose a representative for the General Conference. These electors can only be chosen by the members, in the class-meetings, for it will not be possible to assemble them together at one place, in order to take their votes. It will be a consequence growing out of this arrangement, that each of the candidates for the honor of representing us in the General Conference, will have his elector in every circuit composing the district, who will be pledged to vote for said candidate, in the event of his being placed in the electoral college.—We have now the preliminary arrangements for the combat, and the issue will be easily foreseen. The several candidates for the electoral college must of course visit the different class-meetings in the circuit, to set forth the pretensions and superior qualifications of the person whom he has been led to prefer, as a representative to the church legislature. These claims may at first be modestly set forth—but presently opposition will enlist and warm his feelings; as the time of the election draws nearer, and the contest becomes doubtful, pride and partizan zeal will enter the lists. The disgrace and mortification of defeat, the glory and triumph of victory, urge on the combatants, and the "on brethren, on," of the Rev. Mr. Snethen,* will every where be heard, animating the competitors, and encouraging the contest.

The feelings of the members will soon catch the kindling flame—personal friendship for the candidates, or the interest they may feel for the measures they severally

* See the Mutual Rights, Vol. 3, page 248.

propose to carry in the General Conference, cannot fail of effect; parties and caucuses will be formed, which will necessarily alienate their affections from each other —brotherly love no longer continuing, strife and envy, evil speaking and slander will take the place of those fruits of the spirit, peace, long-suffering and meekness, and of that humility, which has so long taught us each to esteem the other better than himself. From such scenes, the more pious, humble and retiring, though obviously the most competent part of the membership, will seek to hide themselves, and mourn over calamities they cannot control; while the froward and assuming, the vain and the self-conceited, will be brought forward, and obtain by their party zeal, and desire of distinction, the suffrages of their brethren. Beloved reader, brother in Christ—I am no prophet, neither the son of a prophet, but I venture to predict without the spirit of prophecy, that this is but a very faint representation of the scenes which will certainly follow the changes which you are urged to effect in the government of the Methodist church. Our class-meetings, heretofore blessed to us as a peculiar privilege, where we have been accustomed to speak and to think only of spiritual things, will then become, over this whole continent, so many arenas for electioneering, strife and contention; where brother will seek to traduce and misrepresent brother, in order to lessen his influence in an approaching election; and where feuds and personal enmities will be engendered, fearful in their consequences, and interminable in their duration. I care not whether elections in our church be for preachers, class-leaders, or delegates to the General Conference, or the Annual Conferences, only make them of sufficient importance to excite competition, and awaken that desire for distinction which finds a place in every human bosom, until it is cast out by perfect love, and the same destructive consequences will inevitably follow, so long as man continues what he is, a weak and fallible being."—[Bond.

According to the plan actually adopted by the seceding Methodists, these dangerous liabilities are increased *four or five fold*, for they have not only an election once in *four* years for the General Conference, but *every* year for the Annual Conference, besides the election of Appointing Committees, Class-leaders, &c., keeping up a constant agitation in all departments of the church. Well may they, as Mr. Shinn declares, have "difficulty in keeping their denomination from being scattered to the winds by a loose and deplorable spirit of anarchy!" And if this arrangement could succeed tolerably with their small numbers, yet how would it operate among our vast membership?

Thus, then, it is manifest that this demand for *republican forms* in our economy is not justified by any analogy between the church and the state in their *authority*, their *origin*, or *design*—nor by the example of most voluntary organizations of a *secular character* in the land—nor by the example of *other churches*—nor by any important *want* or *liability* in our present system—That it has insurmountable *pecuniary difficulties*—that from the proportion of the clergy to the laity it would be *absolutely impracticable* on the true republican principle—and that even on an *aristocratic plan* of disproportionate representation, it would be attended with *processes*, *agitations*, *and*

strifes in our large body, which would be utterly incompatible with the pacific character of religious institutions, and would probably prove destructive to our cause.

We now proceed to examine our Economy as it is, and to show that it is actually under a sufficient popular control in another form. In our brief limits we cannot of course notice all those features of it which are condemned by seceders. We shall, therefore, in the following observations keep in view the chief one, viz., its Episcopacy, remarking here, however, *that the design and checks which justify and restrain this, apply to the others also;* if they are found sufficient in this instance, they of course will not be deemed inadequate in subordinate cases. With this preliminary remark, three things are to be considered in forming a just idea of the Methodist economy. First, its *chief object*, second, its *chief power*, third, its *appropriate checks or balances.*

First. Its chief design (subordinate to its spiritual ends) is the maintenance of *Itinerancy* in the ministry. *This is its stamped feature.* Nothing pertaining to it is more prized by Methodists. Even in the dense population of England, among the old and well established societies of London and Liverpool, the preachers are required to exchange every Sabbath, and to remove every two or three years.—Some of the reasons for this can only be referred to here.

1. It is recommended by Scriptural example. The fathers of our church speak thus on this point.

"The following portions of the word of God are pointed in support of the itinerant plan for the propagation of the gospel; which plan renders most of the regulations of the General and Annual Conferences essential to the existence of our united society: Matt. x. 5–11, 'These twelve [apostles] Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And *as ye go, preach*, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And into *whatsoever city or town* ye shall enter, inquire,' &c. Matt. xxii. 8–10, 'Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye, therefore, into *the highways, and as many as ye shall find*, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into *the highways*, &c. Matt. xxviii. 19, 'Go ye, therefore, and *teach all nations*,' be as extensively useful as possible. Mark vi. 7–12, "And he calleth unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two,—and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, *save a staff only.*—And he said unto them, *In what place soever* ye enter into a house, there abide, till ye *depart* from that place.—And *they went out*, and preached that men should repent.' Luke x. 1–9, 'After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face *into every city and place*, whither he himself would come.—And into *whatsoever house* ye enter,' says our Lord to them, 'first say, Peace be to this house.—And into *whatsoever city* ye enter and they receive you, say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.' Luke xiv. 23, 'And the Lord said unto the servant, *Go out into the highways and hedges*, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.' Acts viii. 4, 'They that were scattered abroad *went everywhere* preaching the word.' Acts

viii. 40, 'Philip—preached *in all the cities*, till he came to Cesarea.' Acts xvi. 36, 'Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go *again* and visit our brethren *in every city* where we have preached the word of the Lord,' &c. * * * *Timothy* and *Titus* were *travelling bishops*. In short, every candid person, who is thoroughly acquainted with the New Testament, must allow, that whatever excellencies other plans may have, *this* is the primitive and *apostolic* plan. But we would by no means speak with disrespect of the faithful *located* ministers of any church. We doubt not, but, from the nature and circumstances of things, there must have been many located ministers in the primitive churches: and we must acknowledge, with gratitude to God, that the *located* brethren in our church are truly useful and of considerable consequence, in their respective stations. But, on the other hand, we are so conscious of the vast importance of the *travelling plan*, that we are determined, through the grace of God, to support it to the utmost of our power; nor will any plea which can possibly be urged, however plausible it may appear, or under whatever name proposed, induce us to make the least sacrifice in this respect, or, by the introduction of any novelty, to run the least hazard of wounding *that plan*, which God has so wonderfully owned, and which is so perfectly consistent with the apostolic and primitive practice."—Notes to Disc. of 1796.

2. It comports with the design of the Christian ministry. Christianity was not designed to be like Judaism, a local system, but aggressive, until it should be universal. The missionary idea should not be incidental, as it is in the systems of most modern churches, dependent on casual impulses and occasional liberality, but should be incorporated into the very constitution of the ministry—its ostensible characteristic. Such was the meaning of the divine commission, "Go ye into all the world;" such was the character of the primitive ministry during its itinerant operations. The truth broke forth on the right and on the left, till it overspread and outspread the Roman empire. When it pleased God to raise up Wesley, only about two or three of even incidental forms of aggressive action were to be found in the Protestant churches. He was providentially led to introduce an arrangement which should put Protestant lands themselves under a great system of missionary operations—Itinerant circles of ministerial labor, which, while they conveyed the gospel to the millions of domestic heathen, who had scarcely been affected by the existing localized system, should also send forth tangents of evangelic light to the millions abroad.

3. It has an inestimable influence on the ministry itself. It is a heroic training which the greatest military captains might applaud. We need not enlarge here; any reflecting mind must perceive that such a system as the Methodist Itineraney is remarkably adapted, as a vehicle, for the enthusiastic energy which characterizes fervid and highly devotional minds, and is equally fitted to keep alive that energy. It is also well suited to preclude men of false character, for it is almost entirely a system of sacrifice; by its access to all classes, it

affords an invaluable knowledge of human nature; by its constant exercise it produces athletic frames and energetic temperaments; by its incessant labors an exclusive devotedness to one work; by its frequent changes a pilgrim spirit. Most of its laborers may say with their great poet,

> "No foot of land do I possess,
> No cottage in this wilderness,
> A poor wayfaring man;
> I lodge awhile in tents below,
> And gladly wander to and fro,
> Till I my Canaan gain."

This effect the world witnesses. Do we assert too much when we say, that for one hundred years the Methodist ministry, though mostly uneducated, have transcended in labors, in results, and in conservative adherence to their great principles, any other body of men engaged in moral labor on the earth?

4. It distributes in turn to most of the societies the various talents of the ministry. This is an important consideration to those who have witnessed its operation; but it can only be alluded to here.

5. It produces a sentiment of unity throughout the church. In no sect is there more co-operation, more of the *esprit du corps*. Scarcely is a church erected or any important measure attempted, that does not enlist the common sympathy of the body; and this results, to a great extent, from our having pastors who, by frequent changes, become individually common to us all.

6. By it one preacher can supply a *plurality* of societies. This is one of its capital advantages. In a sparse population a single circuit sometimes takes in ten or twenty appointments. Methodism has thus supplied our frontier for fifty years with the gospel. The usual stationary ministries wait for the *call of the people*, except in their collateral missionary labors: the Methodist ministry goes forth *to call the people*. This is one of its strongest points of contrast. It is *the missionary church*. Its adaptation in this respect to our own country is worthy of remark. While the great moral revolution of Methodism was going on across the Atlantic, the greatest political revolution of modern times was in process on our own continent; and when we contemplate the new adaptations of religious action which were evolved by the former, can we resist the conviction that there was a providential relation between the two events —that they were not only coincident in time, but also in purpose. While Wesley and his co-laborers were reviving christianity there, Washington and his compatriots were reviving liberty here. It was

the American Revolution that led to the developement of the resources of this vast country, and rendered it the assembling place of all kindreds, tongues, and people; and Methodism commenced its operation sufficiently early to be in mature vigor by the time that the great movement of the civilized world toward the west began. It seems to have been divinely adapted to this emergency of our country. If we may judge from the result, it was raised up by Providence more in reference to the new than to the old world. Its peculiar measures were strikingly suited to the circumstances of the country, while those of every other contemporary sect were as strikingly unadapted to them. The then usual process of a long preparatory training for the ministry, could not at all consist with the rapidly increasing wants of the country. The usual plan of local labor, limited to a single congregation or to a parish, was inadequate to the wants of Great Britain at that time; but much more so to those of the new continent. That extraordinary conception of Wesley, an itinerant ministry, met in the only manner possible the circumstances of the latter. No one can estimate what would have been the probable result of that rapid advancemant which the population of the United States was making beyond the customary provisions for religious instruction, had not this novel plan met the emergency. Much of what was then our frontier, but since has become the most important States of the Union, would have passed through the forming period of its character destitute, to a great extent, of the influence of Christian institutions. But the Methodist Itinerancy has borne the cross, not only in the midst, but in the van of the hosts of emigration. Methodist Itinerants are found with their horses and saddle bags threading the trail of the savage, cheering and blessing with their visits the loneliest cottage on the farthest frontier. They have gone to the aboriginal tribes, and have gathered into the pale of the church more of the children of the forest than any other sect; they have scaled the Rocky mountains, and are building up christianity and civilization on the shores of the Columbia; they are hastening down towards the capital of Montezuma, while, throughout the length and breadth of our older States, they have been spreading a healthful influence which has affected all classes, so that their cause includes not only a larger aggregate population than any other sect, but especially a larger proportion of those classes whose moral elevation is the most difficult and the most important,—the savage, the slave, the free colored man, and the lower classes generally.*

* Dr. Baird, (a Presbyterian,) in his late invaluable work on Religion in America, speaking of difficult portions of our moral field

7. It provides for poor churches. At least *one-third* of our societies do not afford a competent support. Yet we supply them with preachers, and by annual or biennial changes these preachers are replaced, and the disadvantages of such places relieved, by being shared among them. By any other plan such societies must be abandoned. Do away the itinerancy and Methodism *would at once contract, by at least one-third*, its sphere of labor, and lose nine-tenths of its moral power. This, under God, is the great secret of its triumphs. Pages could be written on the subject.

8. This system has been found by experiment not only practicable and, in connection with our classes and other means, perfectly adapted to the pastoral and other wants of our densest communities as well as the wilderness, but also the most successful one yet adopted by Protestant Christendom. We would not speak of it with sectarian gratulation, but in proof of our position and in humble gratitude to the great Head of the church, who, in his mercy has made us "a peculiar people," "which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God."

Methodism is but little more than a century old in England.—

exclaims—"Blessed be God, there is a way, as I shall show hereafter, by which some of the evils here spoken of may be mitigated; and that is by the system of itinerant preaching employed in the United States, so extensively, and usefully, by the Methodists;" and again he says, "It has been said, with truth, that the Methodist Church is in its very structure emphatically missionary, and it is an inexpressible blessing that it is so, as the United States strikingly prove. The whole country is embraced by one General Conference; it is again subdivided into thirty-two Annual Conferences, each including a large extent of country, and divided into districts. Each dissrict comprehends several circuits, and within each circuit there are from five or six to above twenty preaching places. Ordinarily, as often as once in the fortnight, a circuit-preacher conducts a regular service at each of these preaching places, whether it be a church, schoolroom, or a dwelling house. In the largest towns and villages such services are held on the Sabbath, and on a week-day or evening in other places, and thus the Gospel is carried into thousands of remote spots, in which it never would be preached upon the plan of having a permanent clergy, planted in particular districts and parishes. It was a remark, I believe, of the celebrated Dr. Witherspoon, that "he needed no other evidence that the Rev. John Wesley was a great man, than what the system of itinerating preaching presented to his mind, and of which that wonderful man was the author." The observation was a just one. It is a system of vast importance in every point of view, capable of being made to send its ramifications into almost every corner of the country, and to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the most remote and secluded settlements, as well as to the more accessible and populous towns and neighborhoods."

Other dissenting bodies were in operation centuries before it, yet it has outstripped every one of them in the number of its societies and its pecuniary efforts for the salvation of the heathen. The substance of a recent report showing the dissenting force arrayed against Puseyism, has been re-published in the American religious papers. (See Chris. Intelligencer, Feb. 1844.) It gives to the Methodists in England and Ireland a number of societies equal to about half *of all* the dissenting societies in England and Wales. They are stated at 4000 in England and Ireland; the Baptists in England and Ireland at 1676; Independents, in England and Wales, 2316 churches; Presbyterians, (Orthodox,) in England, 120 churches, &c. The dissenting aggregate is stated at about 8,000. This report is irregular in excepting from its statistics of the Methodists their numerous societies in Wales and Scotland, while it also excepts the Baptists in the same places and the Independents and Presbyterians in Ireland. We give it as it is. It is sufficient to show the remarkable superiority of the Methodist Economy.

Not sixty years have yet passed since the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, and but about seventy-five since the arrival of the first Methodist Itinerant. Other evangelical bodies had been operating here more than a century, and yet the Methodist Episcopal Church, exclusive of several other classes of Methodists, exceeds by nearly one half any other Protestant sect of the country. The Baptists are the next in numbers; the Baptist Register states their present communicants at 632,200. The last Methodist Minutes report our numbers at 1,068,525 members, 4,000 preachers, and 7,700 local preachers. As an evidence of the missionary character of our system, it ought to be stated that this estimate includes 3,379 Indians, and 128,410 colored people, and that about 90,000 of the latter are in our missions to the slaves. Its success still advances. The increase last year alone was 154,000, (and of this increase 800 were Indians, and 20,000 colored people,) more than twice as large as the whole Protestant Episcopal Church in the U. States, a sister church which has our doctrines and Episcopacy without our Itinerancy.*

* Dr. Dixon, late President of the Wesleyan Conference, England, says: "Taking into account the present numbers and position of the American Methodist Episcopal Church—the wide area of the United States—the rapidly increasing population of the country—the adaptation of their system to meet the wants of a scattered and new population—and, above all, the completeness of their church order, which is evidently looked upon with affectionate and loyal veneration on the part of the people—we are furnished with moral *data* for the

The efficiency of our system may be further inferred, from its local success in New England, where it has had a perpetual conflict with the prevalent theology and views of ecclesiastical government. A series of careful statistical articles were published in the Herald and Journal, 1842. They compare the per centage of our increase with that of the whole population of New England. The population of

New England	increased	from	1800	to	1810	19⅓ per cent.
Methodism	"	"	"	"	92	"
New England	"	"	1810	to	1820	12½ "
Methodism	"	"	"	"	58	"
New England	"	"	1820	to	1830	17½ "
Methodism	"	"	"	"	98½	"
New England	"	"	1830	to	1840	14 "
Methodism	"	"	"	"	85	"

The per centage of our increase, it will be seen, is far in advance of that of the general population. If we compare our numbers with the whole population, we discover a rapidly increasing ratio. Thus, beginning ten years after our origin, in

1800	there was one	Methodist	in every 211	of the whole population.
1810	"	"	131	"
1820	"	"	94	"
1830	"	"	56	"
1840	"	"	34	"

These ratios we obtain without including the thousands of New England Methodists comprehended in the New York and Troy Conferences. We have estimated the latter, for 1840, at 22,000, and we are certain that this estimate is short of the truth. Including these, our ratio, for 1840, will be one in twenty-five. Thus, in forty years, our ratio to the whole population has advanced from one in two hundred and eleven to one in twenty-five, exhibiting a rapid gain on the general population.

The Methodist membership in New England has more than doubled every twelve years since 1796.

Compare now these local estimates with the numbers of other sects. Our Congregational brethren have been in the field more than 200 years, four times as long as ourselves. They possessed it wholly a large portion of the time. Besides the advantage of pre-

conclusion, that the American Methodist Church must in the ordinary course of things, become one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, united Protestant body in the world."

possessing the ground, they have had numerous auxiliary means, (peculiar to themselves,) of not only retaining their original strength, but of extending it with the increase of population. From the minutes of their General Associations for the different New England States, (mostly of 1841—a year later than our own statistics, as given above,) we compile the following estimates of communicants :—

Connecticut,	35,688	Rhode Island,	2,577
Massachusetts,	57,563	Maine,	17,338
New Hampshire,	17,581	Vermont,	22,666
		Total,	153,413

The total of Methodist members which we have given New England, for 1840, is 87,000. Compared with the aggregate returns of the Congregationalists, it gives us considerably more than one half their number enrolled in less than one-fifth their time. In some of the New England States our aggregate exceeds theirs. We have no means of ascertaining the per centage of their increase, but the above statements show that it must be considerably short of our own.

Our Baptist brethren are a numerous and successful denomination in New England. Their first church was established by Roger Williams, in 1639, about 150 years before Jesse Lee's visit to New England. By the time of this visit, they were 20,000 strong. The Baptist Memorial *extra*, (p. 22,) for 1842, gives the following returns from each of the New England States, for 1840 :

Maine,	20,490	New Hampshire,	9,557
Vermont,	11,101	Massachusetts,	26,311
Connecticut,	11,725	Rhode Island,	5,962
		Total,	85,146

Our membership for 1840 being 87,000, gives us nearly 2,000 majority over the Baptists, though we have been in the field but one fourth of their time.

The above two denominations are leading ones in New England. They are far in advance of any others with which we might institute further comparisons, and are therefore sufficient for our purpose.

The foregoing calculations afford the following result, viz. : *That the Methodist Church is second in New England in numbers, and first in progress.*

There is an apparent invidiousness in such comparisons, but we have made them with no such feeling. They are presented as matters of fact, illustrative of our actual advancement. While the ra-

pidity of our advancement is an occasion of undisguised congratulation and gratitude, we trust we should rejoice were that of our sister churches a hundred fold greater than it is.

We have said that our Itinerant arrangement, though itself a system of domestic missionary circles, sends forth tangents of evangelic influence to the foreign world. The Wesleyan Methodists are unsurpassed in their zeal for foreign missions. According to a table in the London Missionary Register for 1842, their annual missionary contributions are greater than those of any other benevolent society whatever in Protestant christendom, except the British & Foreign Bible Society and the English Church Missionary Society. Besides their centenary contribution of a million dollars, they have recently raised about $500,000 yearly for missions. Their missionary communicants *are more numerous than the missionary communicants of all the other European Protestant churches put together.**

The Methodist Missionary Society in the United States extends its labors to Africa, South America, Oregon, our frontier Indians, our slaves and other domestic fields. It is not yet twenty-five years old, yet it now includes and supplies with the bread of life a noble army of nearly 40,000 communicants, among these are more than 4,000 Indians, and nearly 15,000 colored people, and the last year's minutes record an increase of nearly 800 of the former.† It sustains a band of missionary laborers more than 300 strong. We assert that, all things considered, these results are not exceeded in the history of modern missions. If we exclude the thousands of white communicants in the Methodist missions in this country (20,000,) and in the Wesleyan missions in France, the British Provinces, &c., *the remaining communicants of the united methodist missions are considerably more than all the missionary converts of all the rest of protestant christendom put together!* ‡

These are facts, and they speak with a voice that cannot be misunderstood. Here is a sect which, with little pretension to adventitious influence, and through much obloquy and poverty, has in about a century equalled in England about one half of most the dissenting bodies put together, and in this country is nearly twice as large as any other sect

*Besides these and other numerous benevolent efforts, the Wesleyans have before their recent extraordinary efforts for education, sustained in England and Wales more than 270 day schools, including more than 20,000 children, and 3,600 Sabbath schools. They teach in these schools nearly 40,000 scholars at an annual expense of $100,000.

† The Minutes report our Indian members at 3379, the Missionary Report at more than 4000; the latter we judge most accurate.

‡ About one third more. See the Foreign Missionary Chronicle for 1843, Methodist Missionary Report for 1843, and S. S. Messenger Feb. 16, 1843.

of the land, though many had buried generations of communicants before it had *one*, and this same sect exceeds in its missionary c nverts those of all the rest of protestant christendom. To what is this extraordinary success attributable? Assuredly there is some most potent cause for it. It would be uncharitable to ascribe it to our doctrines alone, for the fundamental ones are common to all evangelical churches. Is it ascribed to our zeal? But that zeal through the effect of the divine spirit is produced by means. And what are our peculiar means? What but our ministerial arrangement, our *Itinerancy*, infusing missionary energy into all its auxiliary provisions? This is the main mast of our barque—the engine of our train. Who then shall presume to propose innovations that may affect unfavorable this stupendous instrument? Are we not right in scrupling to touch it rudely, lest, like him who touched the ark, the symbol of Israel's strength, we fall and perish as a denomination? If there is any feature of their cause to which Methodists should adhere immovably, it is their glorious itinerancy. Who can recount what it has accomplished under the blessing of God, for this land? What would Methodism be without it in ten or twenty years? It is, indeed, a system of sacrifice, but the sacrifice is mutual between the ministry and the people, and infinitely greater with the former than the latter, and all its hardships are abundantly indemnified by its singular usefulness. It has enabled us pre-eminently to preach the gospel "to the poor;" it has given us the van rank of the church, in the progress of the western frontier, and throughout the length and breadth of this land its fruits are like the herbage of the fields. We repeat, the missionary ardor and energy of the church, growing out of our itinerancy, has, under God, done this, and the day that this is forgotten, Methodism begins to wane. *

* Dr. Baird pays the following tribute to our church:—"Since its organization in 1784, though not without its share of difficulties, its career, upon the whole, has been remarkably prosperous, and God has enabled it to overcome every hindrance with wonderful success. We have seen the numerical amount of its members sixty years ago to be 15,000; in 1843 it was 1,068,525 communicants. And the probable proportion of the community under the influence of this church's ministry, that is, who attend its preaching, as stated by Bishop Soule before the British Conference in August, 1842, is 5,000,000. Surely we may well exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" It covers the whole land with its network system of stations and circuits, and carries the Gospel into thousands of the most remote as well as the most secluded and thinly-peopled neighborhoods. This denomination has made great exertions to increase the number of its church edifices within the last few years. But its itinerating ministers preach

Second. The *chief object* of our system being determined, the question respecting its *chief* or *directing power* recurs. Where shall the appointing power be vested, for it must exist and exist vigorously to propel such machinery?

I. It is clear in the first place, that it cannot be left to the *preachers* and *societies themselves*, because

1. Such are the tendencies of human nature that the larger societies would be disposed to choose the most popular men, and the more popular preachers would be likely to reciprocate the disposition. The wealthier would thus keep always the best preachers, and the gifts of the ministry would not be distributed. One important advantage of the Itinerancy would hereby be lost.

2. The less able preachers, kept by the above course in the feeble appointments, would sooner or later be starved out, compelled to retire to their work-shops and ploughs, and a large portion of our work be abandoned. This is a result that we can hardly now avoid. The least relaxation would render it uncontrollable, and thus, as we have said, one third of our appointments soon be destroyed and much of our moral energy gone. We soberly believe that this result would ensue in a very few years after such an arrangement of the appointing power.

3. Many societies would be liable to choose the same man, and many men the same place; who shall then decide? And

4. If even there could be devised a mode of determining such cases, yet if the *Itinerancy* is to be maintained in *fact* and not merely in name, if these changes are to be as frequent and as extensive as they now are, what a scene of negociation, strife and disappointment must be kindled every year or two in the societies! Would not these inevitable consequences more than counterbalance the advantages of such an abortive Itinerancy? Would it not be better to turn Congregationalist entirely and at once? Yet this is virtually the system

in thousands of places where no such buildings are yet erected, or at least none belonging to that denomination. In these cases they hold their meetings in schoolhouses, courthouses, and private houses. No American Christian who takes a comprehensive view of the progress of religion in this country, and considers how wonderfully the means and instrumentalities employed are adapted to the extent and the wants of that country, can hesitate for a moment to bless God, for having, in his mercy, provided them all. Nor will he fail to recognize in the Methodist economy, as well as in the zeal, the devoted piety, and the efficiency of its ministry, one of the most powerful elements in the religious prosperity of the United States, *as well as one of the firmest pillars of their civil and political institutions.*"

of the recent seceders, for though they have a committee to adjust the appointments, yet their preachers and societies are allowed to negociate before hand, and the committee are to conform to these previous negociations as far as practicable. In England, where ample funds are possessed, and no new appointment received unless it can, by the aid of these funds, maintain a preacher, this plan might operate, but here it is no better, nay, it is worse than congregationalism. If the committee should not deem it practicable to conform to such arrangements, what dissatisfaction and strife must follow the rupture of the previous negociations? And if they do conform to them, a few leading men will always possess the best appointments, while the feebler societies and preachers must dwindle and fail through neglect.

II. It is evident that a *committee* of *preachers* and *laymen* could not best conduct it.

1. Such a committee could not be disinterested. The preachers on it would have an interest in the appointments, as would also the societies to which the laymen belong.

2. Such a committee would be composed of sectional men; they could not be well acquainted with all the appointments, and the qualifications and conveniences of the respective preachers. Suppose this committee composed of three preachers, one from Boston, one from Worcester, and one from Springfield, and as many laymen from the same or other places, what could they do with the appointment of a hundred or more men to all parts of the Commonwealth? Of most of the places they could know nothing. They must therefore have written or personal communications from most of the appointments; these must be heard, read, compared, discussed, &c. Amidst such confusion, harrassed by conflicting claims, how and when could they come to a conclusion of the business? How much preferable is a permanent committee (such as our Bishops and Presiding Elders vitually are,) who, by making this their responsibility, and traversing the whole field, can become acquainted with the abilities and wants of the individual preachers and societies, and by having no share in the appointments, can be disinterested?

3. Such a committee would require a popular election in the conference; electioneering and caucussing, with their usual evils, favoritism among the preachers, and consequent jealousies and dissensions would follow.

4. We have said that the members of such a committee would have a personal interest in the appointments; now if it were limited to four or five, in order to keep out as much as possible this selfish

interference, it could not, as we have shown, represent generally the societies; it could not know well their wants, while, as we have stated, our present plan includes usually four or five—the presiding Elders and Bishops—without these disadvantages. If, on the other hand, it should be numerous, including representatives from all or most of the societies, it would be a large popular assembly, and never able to come to a determination of so many and such various claims, and would merely give but a fuller play to the selfish interests of its members—and what must be the "confusion worse confounded" which would result where an appeal is allowed, as in the system of the late seceders, from the decisions of the committee to the whole conference, more or less of the members of which must be involved in any change?

5. Similar modifications of the appointing power have been adopted by the Protestant Methodists and have failed. We would not refer to these brethren, mistaken as we suppose them to be, with prejudice, but as affording evidence on what we deem an important question. It cannot be denied that their innovation has proved abortive. At their secession they carried with them a strong ministerial force and a considerable lay membership, but with all the advantages of secessions from the elder church, plausible appeals to the popular feeling in favor of lay rights, the great revivals of the times, and twenty-four years of agitation and sixteen of organized effort, they number but little more than one third of the increase alone of the M. E. Church the last year. They have not erected in this commonwealth, the strong hold of lay rights, a dozen chapels during all these years of agitation and effort. The Itinerant system moves heavily among them. In many important places it is virtually suspended, and many of their societies and preachers, tired of the irregularity and distraction of the plan, have returned to the bosom of the elder church.*

III. In view of these considerations, the Methodist Episcopal Church has chosen superintendents in whom to vest this power—men who have no local or selfish interest in it, but travel over the whole land, and are counselled and aided by presiding elders whose local inspection of the societies enables the superintendent to suit his appointments to their necessities. How could this power be better vested? Our English brethren have a committee of preachers alone, but these have a selfish interest in the appointments; while we have virtually such a committee, (the presiding elders and bishops,) but so situated as not to have any such personal interests.

Thus much for the first two parts—the *Object* and the *Directing*

* Their late arrangements for Baltimore and Philadelphia, are examples.

Power. Now returns the third question,—*What checks are there to this necessary appointing power?* To simply assert that the bishops have it, as our opponents do, without the above views and others that remain, is as startling as it is false. Such a power unnecessary and unbalanced would not be tolerated by Methodists one hour.

Here, then, for the glorious advantages of the *Itinerancy*, are the preachers, on the one hand, giving up the choice of their appointments, and submitting to be sent, like men in battle, to all points of the field; and the people, on the other, abandoning the choice of their pastors. The sacrifice is common to both; both ought, therefore to have a check upon the appointing power, but as it bears most onerously on the preacher, he should have the strongest control of it. What checks, then, have the *Ministry* on this power?

1. They elect the officer who bears it. Methodist bishops have no vote in the appointment of their associates or successors, while in the Protestant Episcopal Church, though every member of the lower house of the General Convention should vote for a candidate the Bishops can reverse his election.

2. The bishop is responsible to them for his conduct, private and official, while, in the Protestant Episcopal church a bishop can be tried and deposed only by bishops.

3. They can modify or utterly abolish his power in the General Conference. This is certainly sufficient control. This dreadful power which is represented as tyrannizing over their destinies, is then *created, controlled* and *can be annihilated* by them at their pleasure! Are they slaves then? No, but their example in this respect is one of the noblest instances of heroic self-sacrifice on the earth; it is morally sublime, and should excite the admiration instead of the abuse of all their fellow Christians.

In the next place, what check have the *People* on this machinery? It is clear that as the preachers appoint the bishops, and the bishops distribute the preachers, the people should check the whole plan by a counterbalance upon the whole ministerial body.

1. This is provided in the most decisive form that it could possibly assume, viz. the *power of pecuniary supplies.* No *stipulated contract* for support exists in the Methodist economy. The Discipline *allows* a certain support, but does not enforce it, and no Methodist preacher *can prosecute a civil suit for his salary.** The General Conference disclaims all right to tax the property of our members. A Methodist church has no necessity, in order to control or remove the

* The word *salary* was changed in the discipline to "*allowance*," in 1808, the year when a delegated General Conference was established.

preacher, to prosecute him by a tedious and expensive process at law, but simply to signify that after a given date his supplies cease. He cannot live on air; he must submit or go. This would be a sufficient guaranty certainly, and this check applies not merely to a specific prerogative of the ministry, but to the *whole* ministerial system. The lamented Dr. Emory thus states it:

"We have said that the Methodist Episcopal Church possesses effective and substantial security against any encroachments of tyranny on the part of her pastors.—This security, to say nothing of higher principles, is amply provided in the fact, so obvious to common sense, that the interests of the preachers as men are not only coincident, but identical with all the interests which bind them to be good pastors; and that these again are identical with the interests of the people. They cannot possibly have any earthly motive for setting themselves in opposition to the people. All human motives are on the other side. And the far greater danger is, that their sense of dependence, and the pressure or apprehension of want, may tempt them, in the general state of our poor fallen nature, to *lower* the gospel standard, and to *relax* its holy discipline, in accommodation to the common frailties of those who hold over them, and over their wives and children, and all most dear to them, the fearful power of feeding or starving them at discretion. For the sober truth is, that there is not a body of ministers in the world more perfectly dependent on those whom they serve than the Methodist *itinerant* ministry. In those churches which have a lay representation, the pastors make legal contracts with their people, and have legal remedies to enforce their fulfilment. We make no such contracts, and have no such remedies. In this, our system is more scriptural, and renders us more dependent. It places us, in fact, not only from year to year, or from quarter to quarter, but from week to week, within the reach of such a controlling check, on the part of the people, as is possessed, we verily believe, byno other denomination whatever; and which is considered, both by them and by us, as a relinquishment of what might be claimed on our part, fully equivalent to the relinquishment on their part of a direct representation in our general conferences."

2. Another powerful check is, that *the people themselves make all their preachers*. No man becomes a preacher in the M. E. Church unless he is first recommended by the society of which he is a member, or the Leader's meeting. With this recommendation he goes before the quarterly conference, which is composed almost entirely of laymen, and they license him. The preacher, presiding elder, or bishop himself, cannot give this license; he can only *write* it, when the people thus order it. And if all the bishops and preachers in the land should wish the preacher thus licensed to become a member of the Conference or travelling connection, he cannot, without the permission of the laymen of the Quarterly conference. A candidate for license must then, first, be *recommended* by a body of laymen; second, this recommendation must be *accepted* by another body of laymen; third, his license must be *annually renewed* by laymen; fourth, if he wishes *ordination*, it must be voted by laymen; fifth, if he

wishes admission to the *conference*, he must be recommended by laymen.

A popular control of the ministry, equal to these two examples, we know not elsewhere in the Christian church. It might be abused to the great injury, or even destruction of the church, but the interests of the laity require its right use, just as the interests of the clergy require the right use of their powers; and it would be about as proper to provide laws against such abuse, as it would to provide laws to keep our opponents from hanging themselves. Such powers have indeed been abused, and men have also hung themselves, but the constitution of the human mind is itself sufficient law against such liabilities.

In this sense it may be said that the Methodists elect their pastors. The church in any given conference is a *unit*. The societies supply the preachers for this general church, through the quarterly conference, with the understanding that out of the body of pastors thus provided by themselves, they are to have a preacher who is to be appointed in such manner as the best interests of the whole church demand. To these remarks, it may be objected, that the preacher has the privilege of appointing some of the officers of the church, who, ex-officio, are members of the quarterly conference. He nominates the stewards, but this can be no material objection, for, as the quarterly conference *elects* them, it can compel him to nominate such as are satisfactory. But the leaders he appoints, and should do so, for these good reasons: 1. *Their* work is *entirely his;* it is pastoral labor. The labors of long circuits would not at first allow the preacher to visit much the members of the local appointments. Leaders did, and still do, this work in another form. It is a spiritual supervision of the church, rightfully pertaining to the ministry, but in this case delegated in part to the leaders. The ministry should certainly have the power to choose their delegates to do their own work. 2. What might be the results if the classes should choose their own leaders, as among the seceders? These classes are often composed of young converts, and include all members, however excitable or extravagant. The man who could be most extravagant, would, in many cases, be preferred; not the aged and experienced, who could instruct and build them up. 3. The process of electioneering, through all the classes once a year, would produce endless distractions and feuds; and 4. members of classes who should vote against their leader, would ever feel uneasy under his guidance; his reproofs would be construed into party prejudice, and his admonitions rejected. Better give up the classes, than have them thus

fountains of discord. But though he appoints these officers, it is obvious that every motive is in favor of the right use of this power and the preceding check applies here most effectually.

"These remarks [on the pecuniary check,] apply not only to the mode in which the preachers are appointed,—on a principle of mutual sacrifice for the general good, and one to which we believe our people peculiarly attached, in support of an itinerant system,—but they apply with equal force to the whole of the official conduct of each individual pastor; and, above all, in his appointment of class-leaders, of which so much has been said. That the pastor, agreeable to our discipline, possesses the right, as a branch of his pastoral oversight, to appoint whom he thinks best qualified to aid him, as leaders, and to continue to change them, is not disputed. But it is equally certain, on the other hand, that the means of his support are in the hands of the classes; and that the supplying or withholding it, as *they* judge proper, is as indisputably *their* right. Were a preacher, therefore, governed by no better principle than his own interest, he could not successfully resist the just wishes of the classes by arbitrarily obtruding on them obnoxious leaders. Suppose a preacher should even be so stupid, or so wicked, as to attempt a course of tyrannical appointments. In the first place, he may be arrested at any period of the year, on application to a bishop or presiding elder, and, if convicted, may be removed, and degraded from the pastoral charge. Or, secondly, supposing it even possible that redress from these sources should be delayed or denied, is it not plain that the classes have the means of redress in their own hands? Suppose they should say to the pastor,—and in circumstances of such extremity they would be justified in saying it,—if you obstinately persist in the vexatious exercise of an extreme power, to force on us obnoxious leaders, we will also exercise our extreme power to withhold our contributions. Where would be his empty boast? Would he not be paralized at once? Who does not see, then, that on our system, the true effective power is, in reality, in the hands of the people; and more perfectly so in fact than in almost any other denomination? It is such a power that the preachers must be mad to provoke its array against them, and more than men to be able to resist it."—[Dr. Emory.

These are some of the respective checks of preachers and people on the necessary power which moves the Itinerancy, and of the latter on the whole ministerial system. What sober man will say, in view of them, that any revolutionary outcry against the probable abuse of such a system is not preposterous? But there are others equally remarkable, and as they are habitual, they may be considered common to both.

1. The Bishops who have this power itinerate throughout the land, and are therefore cut off from local or selfish partialties in making the appointments. They may be now in Mississippi and next season in Maine, and are more than any other men "in labors abundant."

2. They have no superior salaries above their brethren of the ministry, and are considered to be of the same ministerial *order*, having only a distinct *office*, which itself is based on *expediency*, not on an alleged *Apostolic succession*.

3. They have no vote in any question to be decided in General or Annual Conferences, *not even in making rules by which they themselves are to be governed.*

4. Their conduct, both private and official, is examined at every General Conference by a committee of one from each Annual Conference. They are thus virtually arraigned and examined every four years, however pure their reputation.

5. Any person, lay or clerical, can appear before this committee and accuse the Bishop, and that too in his *absence, and without giving him any previous notice.*

6. A Bishop may be *arrested and expelled* not only for *immoral* but for *improper* conduct, — a severity used towards no other member of the church, for "no one but a Bishop, not even a child or a slave can be expelled for the first improper act of that character." *(Hedding on Discipline.)* And an improper use of his powers comes under this head.

7. If a Bishop be expelled he has no appeal: a privilege enjoyed in any other department of the church.*

If there is any oppression in the Methodist Episcopal Church it is on the Bishops. No officer of any other enlightened body on earth, civil or religious, is so severely restrained, and it is indeed questionable whether any man should expose himself to the liabilities which may result from such peculiar restrictions.

It is obvious from the foregoing pages that the proposed change in our economy, is scarcely more than a *matter of form*, so far as a lay control of the church is concerned, while its difficulties and results would be matters of serious reality.

We have been compelled in these brief limits to present merely the skeleton of our arguments, but they afford a comprehensive view of the system of Methodism; and now how does it appear thus viewed, and how appear by the side of it, those partial statements of our opponents, which, in describing its ministerial functions, so cautiously omit its powerful checks and balances. What becomes of the slavery of the preachers and people? Instead of servility, they are presenting an instance of disinterested sacrifice and labor which allies them to the Christians of the first ages, and the results of which on both sides of the Atlantic are exciting the wonder of Christendom.

The complex and yet harmonious constitution of the Methodist Church in the United States, would be an interesting subject of further discussion, had we space. It is a vast system of wheels within

* See Hedding on Discipline, for these and further particulars.

wheels, but all revolving with the facility of a well-made machine; the power which propels it at one extremity balanced by appropriate checks at the other. Our general conferences occurring once in four years, the annual conferences once a year, the quarterly conferences once in three months, the leaders' meetings once a month, the classes once a week, form an admirable series of gradations, extending from one week to four years, and covering all the successive intervals.—To these correspond also our gradations of labor,—bishops traversing the continent, presiding elders travelling over extended districts, circuit preachers occupying less extensive fields, assisted by local preachers and exhorters; and finally, leaders inspecting, weekly, divisions of the local societies.

This system has worked well, the surest proof to sensible men of its excellence. The objections to it refer to hypothetical consequences. Its history records no serious abuse, no more serious defects than such individual acts of administration as result from the common imperfections of our nature, and are liable to occur in the best legislatures and the purest courts of justice.

And now, if from the difference in their origin, nature and design, it is not necessary that religious polities should be modelled on civil ones—if most secular voluntary combinations are not so constructed—if no leading denomination in the land has so modelled its system—if there is no liability in ours, calling for such a change—if such a change is perilous—if it is impracticable—if the only object in ecclesiastical organizations should be practical utility, guarded against oppressive tendencies—and if this system has excelled all others in utility, and is thoroughly guarded against such tendencies, and has never seriously developed such tendencies, shall we not hesitate, nay, shall we not shrink with most serious scrupulosity from any innovation which, by changing its essential features, may enervate its action and frustrate its providential mission. It is now under as salutary a popular control as any representative arrangement could be, why then, sacrifice or risk its efficiency; why throw into rancorous tumult its community, merely to put this already sufficient control in another form, having no other advantage than a vaunted resemblance to a system which has an entirely different nature and purpose? And do not those, who, by outcries of tyranny, and clamorous and unfounded appeals to political sentiments, attempt to destroy this system, and break up the churches which its friends through years of labor and toil have founded, undertake a work which good men should tremble to assume?

It is this system of *voluntary* self-sacrifice and labor, that is de-

nounced by our opponents as "oppression and vassalage." Fellow Christians, our appeal is to you. Judge ye! By it the gospel has kept pace with your frontier settlements; by it we have conveyed the grace of God into every nook and corner of your land; by it we have gathered 90,000 of your slaves into the church, and more of the savages of your wilderness than all other sects put together; by it we have spread a moral leaven throughout the whole practical class of your population, and in some of the higher spheres of society; by it many of your own youth have been reclaimed from vice, and many of your aged gone down in peace to their graves, to rest in hope of the resurrection of the just; and in its communion are now embodied more than a million of your fellow citizens, besides several millions who attend its worship. Under the blessing of our common Lord we have thus succeeded by our peculiar system, and while he thus approves it, we are willing to abide under it, and commit to it our children.

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